

news

JULY 2026

**"If you're not barefoot,
you are overdressed."**

-Unknown



From the Top

Dear Academy Board Members, Administrators, Teachers,
and Staff,

As we move through the summer of 2026, I want to take a
moment to thank you for your dedication and service
throughout the 2025–2026 school year.

This past year brought both opportunities and challenges. I
was continually impressed by the professionalism,
commitment, and care demonstrated across our academies.
Whether in the classroom, supporting students and families,
leading school operations, or serving on academy boards,
each of you contributed to the success of our students and
schools. Thank you.

I hope you are enjoying a well-deserved summer break and
finding time to relax, recharge, and spend time with family
and friends. The work you do is incredibly important, and
taking time to renew your energy is essential.

As we prepare for the 2026–2027 school year, I encourage
you to take advantage of the professional learning
opportunities offered by the LSSU Charter Schools. Investing
in our own growth helps us better serve the students and
communities that depend on us. I wish you a safe and
enjoyable summer.

Chris Oshelski
Executive Director



CONTENTS

2- New Team Member

3- The Sound of Music

4- Finance Corner/Summer Reading

5-6- Campus Outreach

7-8- Professional Development

9-Board Member Recognition

10-15- Academy Spotlights

16- Philosophy, Mission, Vision

17- Your LSSU CSO Team

Welcome to the Team

The LSSU Charter Schools Office is pleased to introduce our new Governance and Compliance Specialist, Mandy Fitzner. In her new role, Mandy will oversee many of the compliance-related responsibilities associated with Epicenter and support our academies in meeting their compliance requirements. Jenny Peterman is working closely with Mandy during the transition and sharing her expertise and knowledge to ensure a smooth onboarding process. We are excited to welcome Mandy to our team and look forward to the contributions she will make in supporting our academies.

Mandy can be reached at mfitzner1@lssu.edu

Family: Mandy is married to Mike who is a physician recruiter for My Michigan. She has three children; Paige, who just graduated from the LSSU Nursing Program, Ella, who attends welding school at Delta Community College in Saginaw, and Jackson, who is a sophomore in high school and is active in golf and hockey.

Hometown: Mandy hails from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

Employment: Mandy spent twenty-two years working in the finance/accounting department for My Michigan/War Memorial Hospital.

Why LSSU Charter Schools? Mandy was ready for a change and eager to pursue a new opportunity for growth. Inspired by her parents, both of whom worked in education, she decided to follow a similar path and eventually sought a position at the university.

Hobbies: Mandy loves to golf, to travel, to take walks, spending time with her husband, and being a hockey mom. She enjoys traveling to the Carribean.

Interesting Fact: Mandy is a newlywed and will celebrate her first anniversary in August 2026.



The Sound of Music

BCA Drama Team Brings "The Sound of Music" to Life at LSSU

The hills were alive in Sault Ste. Marie as the Bay City Academy Drama Team took the stage at the LSSU Arts Center on Wednesday, May 27, for two spectacular performances of the beloved classic, *The Sound of Music*. More than 600 audience members attended the shows, enjoying memorable music and outstanding, professional caliber, performances.

Bay City Academy's talented student performers brought incredible energy, heart, and vocals to the iconic Rodgers and Hammerstein masterpiece. Set in 1930s Austria, the production beautifully captured the true story of the von Trapp family.

Audiences watched in delight as the spirited Maria transformed the strict household of the widowed naval Captain and his seven children, replacing rigid discipline with love, joy, and unforgettable songs. As the story shifted to the family's brave escape over the Alps ahead of the Nazi regime, the drama team kept the crowd on the edge of their seats with a powerful and moving finale.

Putting together a production of this scale requires months of dedication. We want to extend a massive thank you to LSSU Assistant Professor of Theater, Adam St. John, Bay City Academy's K-12 Music Teacher, Sara Messberger, and LSSU Charter Schools Connections Coordinator, Melissa St. John, who made this night possible.

Congratulations to the entire BCA Drama Team on an unforgettable performance! We can't wait to have you back at LSSU.



"I think the theater is as essential to civilization as pure drinking water."

-Vanessa Redgrave



Melissa & Adam St. John



Finance Corner

Happy New Fiscal Year!

August 14
4th Quarter Financial Statements

September 30
Budget Revision Resolution



“At its core, school funding is about equity. Every child deserves a high-quality education, regardless of their zip code.”

-Unknown

Summer Reading Recommendations

Becky Clawson's Picks

The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck

The Scarlet Pimpernel by Baroness Orczy

Chris Oshelski's Picks

The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown

Angels & Demons by Dan Brown

Melissa St. John's Picks

Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn

Mandy Fitzner's Pick

Theo of Golden by Allen Levi

Julie Buchholtz's Picks

A Good Animal by Sara Maurer

Remarkably Bright Creatures

by Shelby Van Pelt



Annual Academic Reports

-Note-

Fall is the time of year when I have the opportunity to visit each of our academies and present annual academic performance reports. I will finalize my schedule by August and will notify each leader regarding the board meeting at which I will be presenting.

As your authorizer, we establish your educational goals, with the exception of any optional academic-specific goals. Prior to my presentation, I will also provide your annual report for review so that you have an opportunity to ask any questions.

Until then, enjoy your summer, and I look forward to connecting with you in the fall.

Julie Buchholtz

Academic Assessment Specialist

Campus Outreach

It has been a busy but wonderful summer. We were excited to welcome five academies to campus for a variety of engaging activities: Tipton Academy, Ridge Park Scholars, Innocademy Allegan, Innocademy Zeeland, and Bay City Academy.

At LSSU CSO, we believe in developing well-rounded students by providing meaningful, hands-on learning experiences. Hosting these academies allowed students to explore new opportunities, build valuable skills, and engage in enriching activities that extend learning beyond the classroom. We are grateful for the opportunity to support our charter school students and look forward to continuing these experiences in the future.

Tipton Academy

LSSU CSO hosted forty-two sixth-grade students and staff from Tipton Academy for a day of exploration and discovery in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Students toured Point Iroquois Lighthouse, participated in hands-on freshwater science activities at the Center for Freshwater Research and Education, and learned about college life at LSSU. The visit combined history, science, and career exploration while strengthening the partnership between LSSU and Tipton Academy.



Ridge Park Academy

In May, LSSU CSO welcomed fifty-six students and staff from Ridge Park Academy for a three-day immersive campus experience. Students explored a variety of academic and hands-on activities including DNA extraction, financial literacy, kinesiology, economics, the Geo Kemp Museum, greenhouse tours, and freshwater science at Pendills Beach. Evening activities included an improv workshop, a visit to the planetarium, and time at the Norris Center. The visit provided students with opportunities to experience college life while exploring future educational and career pathways.



by Melissa St. John, Connections Coordinator

Campus Outreach Continued

Innocademy Zeeland



LSSU hosted fifth-grade students from Innocademy Zeeland for a three-day overnight camp focused on exploration, discovery, and fun. Students toured campus, visited the Geo Kemp Museum, explored the Aquaponics Learning Lab, participated in freshwater science activities, and learned about local history at Point Iroquois Lighthouse. Additional experiences included financial literacy, improvisation workshops, STEM challenges, and time at the Norris Center. The camp introduced students to college.

Innocademy Allegan



In June, LSSU welcomed students from Innocademy Allegan for a three-day overnight camp filled with hands-on learning and outdoor adventure. Students participated in STEM activities, financial literacy, kinesiology, and an admissions tour while also exploring Pendills Beach and Tahquamenon Falls. Evening activities at the Norris Center and time spent in the residence halls gave students a true taste of college life. The camp fostered curiosity, connection, and memorable experiences throughout their stay.

Student Spotlight

A picture is worth a thousand words and this stunning shot of Tahquemenon Falls in Paradise, Michigan says it all. During Innocademy's visit to Lake Superior State University this month, 5th grade student, Claire, captured the beauty of one of Michigan's most iconic landmarks.

We're proud to provide experiences that inspire creativity, exploration, and lifelong memories.

**"TAKE NOTHING BUT
MEMORIES, LEAVE
NOTHING BUT
FOOTPRINTS."**

CHIEF SEATTLE



Tahquemenon Falls

2026-2027 Professional Development



Building Connections: A New Networking Opportunity for Alternative Education Leaders

Leaders from alternative education academies across GVSU, FSU, and LSSU connect to share ideas, address challenges, and collaborate on promising practices.

Dates: September 18th, October 16th, January 15th, February 19th, April 16th, and May 21st from 9:00-10:00 a.m. Agenda Contact Tammy Bell @ tbell@lssu.edu to join the group.

I Love U Guys: Standard Reunification Method (SRM) Training

Building on 2025–26 Crisis Response Training, this half-day session provides a comprehensive overview of the SRP, how to implement it within your organization and how to train your students and staff on using the Standard Reunification Protocol to respond to any crisis. Date: September 30th, from 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. Agenda, Registration

Leading for Instructional Impact

Dr. Jenn Shaver will facilitate three sessions focused on equipping leaders with clarity and actionable strategies to support staff instructional growth during the 2026–27 school year. Sessions will be held October 14th, November 4th, December 2nd from 10:00 - 11:30 AM.

Agenda, Registration

NWEA Standards Report

This one hour session will introduce the new Standards Report that will be available by NWEA in Fall 2026. Date: October 13th from 4-5 p.m. Registration

NWEA Instructional Responsive Planning

An introduction to responsive planning, supporting educators in using MAP Growth data to inform instruction, differentiate learning, and improve student outcomes. Date: October 20th from 4-5 p.m. Registration

NWEA: Responsive Planning Implementation Series: Planning Keys (5 sessions)

This five-session follow-up series supports educators as they apply the Responsive Planning process in their classrooms using the five planning keys. Date: October 27th, November 3rd, November 10th, November 17th, November 24th from 4:00-5:00 p.m. Registration forms coming.

We can't become what we need to be by remaining what we are. — Oprah Winfrey

All progress takes place outside the comfort zone. — Michael John

Professional Development Continued

NWEA Office Hours

NWEA Office Hours are drop-in virtual sessions open to participants in the Fall 2026 Responsive Planning training, providing real-time support for using MAP data effectively. These sessions offer a space to ask questions, refine instructional decisions, and troubleshoot data or technical issues with guidance from specialists. Date: January 12th, February 16th from 3:30-4:30 p.m.
No registration required. [Zoom](#) link.

Math Intervention Model

This three part virtual series is designed to deepen understanding of the math intervention model and support effective implementation. Participants will build on key concepts from the initial training, explore what Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction look like in practice, and engage in collaborative discussions. The series will also focus on strategies for building staff buy-in, planning implementation, and identifying key first steps, including what to look for during classroom observations. Dates: September 30th, October 21st, November 18th from 4-5 p.m. [Agenda](#), [Registration](#)

Special Education Leadership Learning Sessions

Sarah VanderBaan will lead focused sessions on key special education legislation and implementation, offering learning and discussion for special education administrators. Sessions will be held September 9th, October 28th, January 13th, March 10th from 10:00 - 11:30 AM. [Agenda](#), [Registration](#)

Winter Book Study

Lynn Methner will lead a winter 2027 book study (texts provided; selection announced Fall 2026) open to LSSU authorized academy staff, with attendance required for SCECH credit. Dates: January 19th, January 26th, February 2nd, February 9th, February 16th, February 23rd from 4:00 - 5:00 PM. [Agenda](#), [Registration](#)

*All professional development sessions will be presented in a virtual format



Board Member Recognition

Dear Academy Board Members,

Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment to your academy. The world needs more individuals like you who are willing to use their talents and dedication to expand and improve educational opportunities for students in their communities. Thank you for the impact you make every day. We appreciate you and the difference you are making in the lives of students.

-The LSSU Charter Schools Team

Board Members with 5+ Years

Danielle Bascomb
WAY Academy Detroit

April Best
Innocademy

Erica Henderson
Regent Park Scholars

William Johnson
iCademy Global

Freda King
American International Academy

Chris McCahill
Regent Park Scholars

Shannon Murray
Regent Park Scholars

Susan Rhinard
DeTour Technology Academy

Kenneth Williams
Advanced Technology Academy

Board Members with 10+ Years

Veronica Bridson
Charlton Heston Academy

Jeanette Owens
Detroit Service Learning Academy

Jermiah Wolfrom
Momentum Academy

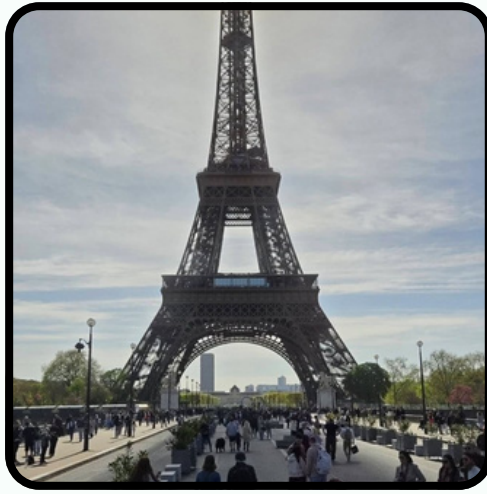
Board Members with 15+ Years

Douglas Bartell
Detroit Service Learning Academy

Orlando Woods
Detroit Service Learning Academy



Yoopers take on France



Forty students and chaperones from Rudyard Area Schools, Les Cheneaux Community Schools, and DeTour Arts and Technology Academy/DeTour Area Schools embarked on the adventure of a lifetime during Spring Break 2026, traveling across France to experience its history, culture, architecture, and global significance firsthand.

The educational tour was organized by Robert Vaught, Superintendent of DeTour Arts and Technology Academy/DeTour Area Schools, with assistance from Beige DeWitt of Rudyard Area Schools. Additional support was provided by Tammy Bell and Chris Olshelski of Lake Superior State University, whose partnership helped create a meaningful international learning opportunity for students from Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula.

Many of the students participating in the trip were members of the GEAR UP program through Lake Superior State University. GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) provides intentional programming designed to help students explore career pathways, prepare for post-secondary education, and identify colleges and universities that best fit their educational goals and interests. Several students on the trip are currently dual-enrolled through Lake Superior State University, while others plan to pursue dual-enrollment opportunities in the future.

The journey began in Paris, where students experienced some of the world's most recognizable landmarks and cultural treasures. From viewing the Eiffel Tower and exploring the city's historic districts to learning about French culture and daily life, students were immersed in an environment far different from what they experience in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The group's travels continued to the magnificent Palace of Versailles, where students witnessed the grandeur of French royalty and gained a deeper understanding of the events that helped shape modern Europe. Additional stops included the breathtaking Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres, renowned for its stunning stained-glass windows and remarkable Gothic architecture.

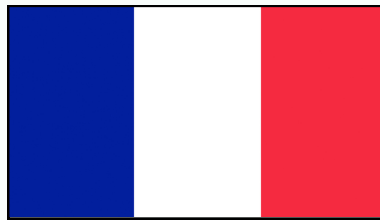
Paris: The Ultimate Field Trip

Traveling through the Loire Valley, students explored two of France's most celebrated castles, Château de Chenonceau and Château d'Amboise. The sites offered a glimpse into Renaissance France and provided opportunities to connect classroom learning with real-world historical experiences.

One of the highlights of the trip was visiting Mont-Saint-Michel, the iconic island abbey rising dramatically from the sea. Students also explored the historic walled city of Saint-Malo along the Brittany coast, learning about France's maritime history and strategic importance throughout the centuries.

As the tour moved into Normandy, students experienced some of the most significant locations associated with World War II. Visits to Pointe du Hoc, Omaha Beach, Arromanches, and the American Cemetery in Colleville sur-Mer provided powerful lessons about courage, sacrifice, and the cost of freedom. While visiting Pointe du Hoc, the group enjoyed an unexpected Upper Peninsula connection when they encountered Mr. and Mrs. McCready from Sault Ste. Marie, reminding everyone just how small the world can sometimes be.

Standing on the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc and walking the sands of Omaha Beach allowed students to gain a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices made by Allied forces during the D-Day invasion. The solemn beauty of the American Cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach left a lasting impression on many participants and served as a poignant reminder of the thousands of young Americans who gave their lives during World War II.



C'est la vie



Paris: The Ultimate Field Trip



The educational experience concluded in Paris with a visit to the Louvre Museum, home to some of the world's most famous works of art, including the Mona Lisa. The museum provided students with an opportunity to experience centuries of artistic achievement while reflecting on the many historical and cultural lessons they encountered throughout their journey.

Beyond the destinations themselves, the trip provided students with valuable life experiences. Participants learned to navigate international airports, public transportation systems, language barriers, cultural differences, and the responsibilities that come with international travel. Students developed confidence, independence, adaptability, and a broader understanding of the world around them.



"This trip was about much more than sightseeing," said Vaught. "It was an opportunity for students to experience history where it happened, to engage with a different culture, and to realize that the world is much larger—and much more connected—than they may have imagined. These are experiences that will stay with them for the rest of their lives."

The success of the Spring Break 2026 France tour reflects the strong partnerships between local school districts, Lake Superior State University, the GEAR UP program, supportive families, and the communities that believe in providing students with opportunities to learn beyond the classroom.



As the group returned home to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, they brought back more than photographs and souvenirs. They returned with new perspectives, lasting friendships, greater confidence, and memories that will endure for years to come—proving that some of life's most valuable lessons are learned while exploring the world beyond our own backyard.

Submitted by Robert Vaught
Former Superintendent of
DeTour Arts & Technology Academy

Farewell to Mr. Vaught as he is leaving DeTour Arts & Technology Academy and has accepted a position with Olivet Schools. Thank you for your years of service at DATA. We wish you the best.

Simple Machines, Big Lessons

At Ridge Park Charter Academy, learning is more than worksheets and textbooks. It's curiosity in action. That's why second grade teacher, Maria Veerakone, invited a special guest to help her students explore science in a hands-on way. Jennifer Richards is an award-winning researcher and certified prosthetist-orthotist at the University of Michigan's Orthotics and Prosthetics Center and enjoys bringing science to life. And that was an experience Maria wanted for her students. "I'm passionate about education and sometimes kids need something more exciting than just the curriculum."



Jennifer Richards
Prosthetist, Orthotist

Richards engaged young learners with an *Engineering is Elementary* lesson on simple machines. "We're learning how simple machines make work easier." Richards explained. "Students will explore inclined planes, carts with and without wheels, and pulley systems to see how these tools reduce the efforts it takes to lift a load."

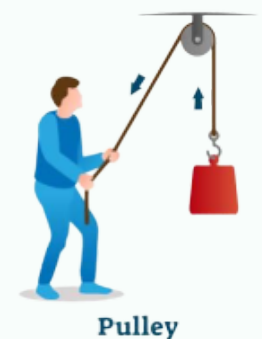
Science wasn't the only thing being taught as students experimented, they practiced curiosity, perseverance, and respect--three core moral focus virtues that help them learn with purpose.

"I love that science teaches kids to think and question. It builds precision and attention to detail skills they can use for life." Maria's classroom is known for more than creative lessons. It reflects her belief that academic excellence and strong character go hand in hand. Students rotated through science stations lifting, testing, and learning about inclined planes and pulleys.

For Richards, the goal is simple, to inspire the next generation. "What I hope they retain is that science is fun and maybe it's something they'll want to do for life."

For Maria, the lesson reinforced exactly what she wants her students to feel every day, that school is a place where they are challenged and celebrated and that learning is exciting.

by Hector Ulloa
Principal of Ridge Park Scholars Academy



Pulley



Lever

Innocademy Allegan



End of Year Celebration



On June 11th, Innocademy Allegan hosted an end-of-year celebration to showcase our students' amazing work and celebrate our 8th graders as they move on to 9th grade at a new school.



Families enjoyed sandwiches, chips and cookies before viewing student projects in their classrooms and then heading outside to cool off in the water in the bounce houses! The evening concluded with a ceremony for our two incredible 8th graders. It was a wonderful way to end the school year!

Washington D.C. Trip

The 7th and 8th grade students at Innocademy Allegan teamed up with middle school students at iCademy for a busy and fun weekend in Washington D.C. on May 14-17th. Students traveled on a charter bus to Washington D.C. where they spent two days touring and visiting historical monuments including the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, Library of Congress, National Archives and Mt. Vernon. They even had the wonderful opportunity of participating in Japanese Culture Day at the Library of Congress!



-Fun Fact-

George Washington never lived in Washington D.C. John Adams was the first president to live in the White House.



Innocademy Allegan

Outdoor Learning Experiences

Outdoor experiences are the foundation of our nature-rich learning at Innocademy Allegan. Through our partnership with the Outdoor Discovery Center, each classroom participated in thirteen half-day field trips this school year to a variety of outdoor spaces including the Outdoor Discovery Center, Van Raalte Farm Park, Pier Cove, Hutchins Lake and DeGraaf Nature Center. Depending on their grade level focus, students gain skills in archery, shelter building, kayaking, fishing, and hiking while also learning about outdoor safety, animals, aquatic plants and species, birds, conservation and local Native cultures.

by
Mykie Reilly, School Lead
Innocademy Allegan

Let the children be free.
Encourage them.
Let them run outside
when it is raining.
Let them remove their shoes
when they find a puddle of water.

-Maria Montessori



Philosophy

We believe in authorizing through the lens of an educator, realizing students are more than academic performance or financial incentives. True authorizing takes into account the whole child, whole academy, and whole community while recognizing the importance of increased performance and sustainability.

Mission

To ensure quality oversight and support to our authorized charter academies resulting in students who are prepared for the next phase of life whether it be attending college, joining the military, or entering the workforce.

Vision

We envision an educational system in Michigan that provides families with diverse educational opportunities that allow each child to flourish and find their place in the global community.

LSSU CSO Team

TAMMY BELL
SCHOOL SUPPORT SPECIALIST
TBELL@LSSU.EDU

LYNN METHNER
FIELD REPRESENTATIVE
LMETHNER1@LSSU.EDU

JULIE BUCHHOLTZ
ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT
SPECIALIST
JHOPPERL@LSSU.EDU

CHRIS OSHELSKI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHARTER SCHOOLS
COSHELSKI@LSSU.EDU

REBECCA CLAWSON
ASSOC. DIRECTOR/FINANCE &
GOVERNANCE SPECIALIST
RCLAWSON@LSSU.EDU

JENNY PETERMAN
REAUTHORIZATION & COMPLIANCE
SPECIALIST
JPETERMAN@LSSU.EDU

MANDY FITZNER
GOVERNANCE & COMPLIANCE
SPECIALIST
MFITZNER1@LSSU.EDU

MELISSA ST. JOHN
CONNECTIONS COORDINATOR
MSTJOHN1@LSSU.EDU

GARNET GREEN
FIELD REPRESENTATIVE
GGREEN3@LSSU.EDU

JOE THIENES
FIELD REPRESENTATIVE
JTHIENES@LSSU.EDU

LSSU CHARTER SCHOOLS
650 W. EASTERDAY AVENUE
SAULT STE. MARIE, MI
49783

MELISSA WEISBERGER
HEAD FIELD REPRESENTATIVE
MWEISBERGER@LSSU.EDU

"Support to Success"